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**June 4, 2006**

**Assembly Committee on Rural Affairs**

**Wisconsin Conservation Congress Testimony – AB 334**

Good morning. Let me begin by thanking the sponsors of Assembly Bill 334, pertaining to the listing of feral hogs as harmful wild animals. You have already heard this morning from state and federal experts who have made a case for why feral hogs should be considered an invasive species and why “harmful wild animal” is the appropriate description for this animal.

I am here today to let you know that the conservation community is aware of this risk to our state’s resources and to offer our support for this bill. On May, 22, 2007 the Executive Council of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress voted unanimously to support AB 334.

The reason for this support rests with the facts that have been laid out for you today. Hogs likely did not walk into Wisconsin, nor did they relocate from Southwestern to Northern Wisconsin without help. Rather they were either unintentionally or intentionally released onto our landscape. Ask Mr. Bill Howe of Crawford County, or any other resident of Wisconsin’s Mississippi Valley what a herd of these hogs can do to a corn field or a fragile riparian ecosystem. By designating these animals as harmful, it brings feral hogs under the jurisdiction of ch. 169, Wis. Stats., and the captive wildlife laws adopted by this legislature. These statutes require thorough recordkeeping and provide the DNR with rule making authority to enforce and monitor feral hogs held in captivity.

This bill will not eliminate the feral hogs we now have that are free-roaming on our landscape, but the bill is a step in the right direction. With this legislation in place our state and federal officials can work with our hunters and landowners to eliminate the current threat roaming our woods, and they will be able prevent more animals from appearing on the landscape.

Thank you to the committee for holding this hearing. Thanks to the bill’s author and sponsors. On behalf of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress we hope that your committee will pass AB 334.

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As established by Wisconsin State Statutes, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress is officially recognized as the only natural resources advisory body in the state where citizens elect delegates to represent their interests on natural resources issues on a local and statewide level to the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources. Their mission is to represent the citizens of Wisconsin by working with the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources to effectively manage Wisconsin’s greatest asset, our abundant natural resources, for present and future generations to enjoy.





**LEE NERISON**

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Remarks of Representative Lee Nerison  
on Assembly Bill 334  
Assembly Committee on Rural Affairs  
June 5, 2007

Good morning fellow committee members, ladies, and gentlemen.

I have authored Assembly Bill 334 in response to concerned citizens in my district who have experienced agricultural and environmental damage due to feral pigs. This bill designates feral pigs as "harmful wild animals" and makes it illegal to possess and propagate them. It helps in the battle against invasive species by helping prevent new releases of feral pigs into the wild.

Those of us from western Wisconsin know first-hand the agricultural and environmental damage that feral pigs have caused there in the past several years. The latest report I've heard this past week is from a farmer in Gays Mills who lost half of his corn crop to feral pigs.

In the past, feral pigs were found primarily in the Gays Mills area, but they're becoming an increasing problem throughout our state. We've gone from 13 counties with sightings or kills of feral pigs in 2004 to 33 counties in 2006 – double the number of counties in just over two years.

You may have heard the recent news reports that feral pigs could have been the cause of a pseudorabies outbreak in domestic hogs in Clark County. Fortunately, this time we were able to retain our pseudorabies-free status for trade purposes with other states.

People are rightly concerned that feral pigs are harmful to our farms, our environment, and our economy. It's time to take aggressive measures because we don't need to keep these disease-spreading, crop-damaging creatures around.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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State of Wisconsin  
Jim Doyle, Governor

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**Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection**  
Rod Nilsestuen, Secretary

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Testimony on Assembly Bill 334  
Relating to: designating feral pigs as harmful wild animals.

Paul J. McGraw, DVM Assistant State Veterinarian  
Division of Animal Health

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection  
June 5, 2007

Chairman Nerison, members of the Committee on Rural Affairs, thank you for allowing me to testify in support of Assembly Bill 334 relating to designating feral pigs as harmful wild animals. The DATCP is very concerned about the disease risk feral swine pose to commercial swine and human health. Feral swine are the last known reservoir for pseudorabies which I will talk about shortly, and swine brucellosis which is a human health risk and recently infected an Iowa swine farmer when his herd became infected from feral swine.

Wisconsin was one of the original pilot states for the national Pseudorabies control and eradication program. The last infected swine herd in the state was depopulated in 1998 and Wisconsin obtained stage 5 status in 2000. Since that time the state has investigated ten to twelve slaughter Pseudorabies reactors annually. Herds were tested no infected herds were found.

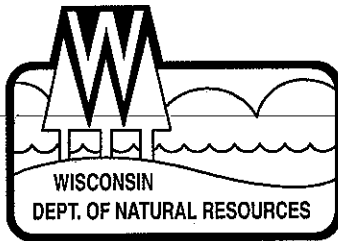
Prior to 2003 there were reports of feral swine in Southwest Wisconsin. Reports continued to increase from other parts of the state. In some instances samples were obtained for Pseudorabies and Brucellosis testing from hunter killed swine but not many feral swine were able to be tested. During 2006 an interagency group consisting of Wisconsin Division of Animal Health and Department of Natural Resources staff along with USDA-APHIS Veterinary Services and Wildlife Services staff and industry was formed to strategize methods to reduce the feral swine population in Wisconsin. One of the reasons this group was formed was because a deer hunter killed several feral swine in late 2005 in Crawford County. Six of the swine tested negative. However, one was inconclusive for Pseudorabies.

This legislation is particularly timely because of the recent pseudorabies outbreak. A Clark County swine producer sold nineteen cull sows and one boar through Central Livestock, St. Paul, Minnesota on March 12, 2007. Several of the sows were slaughtered at a facility in Wisconsin on March 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. Routine slaughter surveillance samples were submitted to the Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (WVDL). One of these samples was classified as a suspect and one positive. Both samples were referred to the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) where they were confirmed positive. This was followed up with a herd test that confirmed a positive herd of around three hundred head of swine. Testing of contact herds found a second positive herd of Eurasian type swine. It is suspected that this was the source herd for pseudorabies and had the potential to be exposed to feral swine. The DATCP was able to depopulate the two positive herds and test all swine within five miles of the affected swine utilizing livestock premises registration and mapping along with area surveys since all swine herds were not registered. It was decided in conjunction with USDA to label these two affected

*Agriculture generates \$51.5 billion for Wisconsin*

herds as transitional swine herds due to potential exposure to feral swine. This allowed Wisconsin to maintain its pseudorabies free status, saving the industry millions of dollars in testing fees which would have been required prior to export and possibly prior to movement within state.

Due to feral swine being the last known reservoir of both pseudorabies and swine brucellosis in the country the DATCP is in favor of AB 334 to label feral swine as a harmful wild animal. The DATCP would suggest an amendment to the bill clarifying language to state Eurasian type and or feral swine. Generally, feral would refer to all wild pigs. The term Eurasian swine is commonly used for the breed of pig that is favored on hunting preserves. Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



## State of Wisconsin \ DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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Assembly Bill 334

June 5, 2007

Remarks of Scott Loomans  
Wildlife Regulation Policy Specialist  
Bureau of Wildlife Management

Chairman Nerison and members of the Assembly Committee on Rural Affairs:

I'm happy to appear in support of Assembly Bill 334 which adds feral pigs to the statutory list of Harmful Wild animals.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has adopted the position that feral pigs are exotic, non-native wild animals that pose significant threats to both the environment and to agricultural operations. The Department promotes aggressive removal anywhere feral pigs are reported.

Being listed as a harmful wild animal means that individuals would not be able to possess feral hogs in captivity unless the department writes rules establishing standards for enclosures, care and handling.

Experience has shown that it is nearly impossible to contain feral hogs with a fence, so we view this as something that needs to be done in order to eliminate one of the last possible sources of introduction. It is already illegal to hold canned hunts or to intentionally release feral pigs into the wild.

Your handout contains information on the biology, behavior and distribution of feral hogs. I would like to run through that very briefly and then talk a little bit about the experiences that two of our local wildlife biologists have had in different parts of the state.

Again, the department supports AB 334 in order to reduce the likelihood of additional introductions of feral pigs in Wisconsin.

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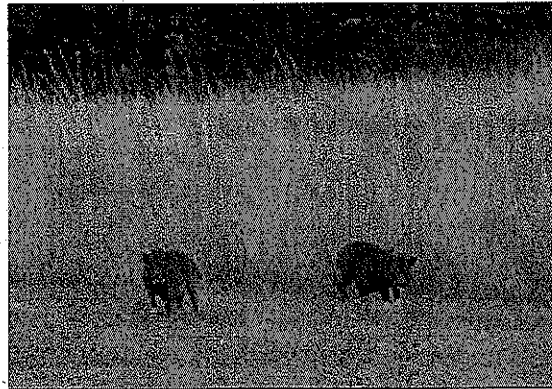
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# Wisconsin Feral Pig Information



Feral Pigs in Manitowoc County - 2004

Feral pigs (*Sus scrofa*)

## Department Position

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has adopted the position that feral pigs are exotic, non-native wild animals that pose significant threats to both the environment and to agricultural operations. The Department promotes aggressive removal anywhere feral pigs are reported. Feral pigs are considered unprotected wild animals with no closed season or harvest limit. Feral pigs may be removed any time throughout the year as long as those choosing to pursue them possess a valid small game license and the permission of the landowner where they intend to hunt. Also, landowners may shoot feral pigs on their own property without a hunting license, under DNR's animal nuisance control authority. It is illegal to operate a captive feral pig hunting facility in the state of Wisconsin. It is also illegal to stock feral pigs for hunting purposes or to release hogs into the wild. Should such illegal practices be discovered in your area, contact and alert your local conservation warden immediately.

For local hunting information, you may contact Dave Matheys, Wildlife Biologist for Vernon and Crawford Counties at 608-637-3938.

For general feral pig information, contact Brad Koele

## Ecology

Feral pigs are mid-sized hoofed mammals with a long, pointed head and stocky build. Males and females look much alike. Wild hogs exhibit great variation in color and size. The average wild sow weighs about 110 pounds (ranging from 80 to 330 pounds) and the average wild boar weighs about 130 pounds (ranging from 100 to 440 pounds). Unusually large, trophy-sized feral pigs have been taken that reach three feet tall, six feet

long and over 500 pounds. Their hair is coarse with long bristles (coarser, denser and longer than that of a domestic pig). Colors and patterns range from solid black, gray, brown, blonde, white, or red to spotted and belted combinations of these same colors. Most generally, however, the animals are black. An adult develops a thick, scruffy mane with stiff bristles.



Feral Pig in Crawford County - 2004

Feral pigs have elongated, flexible, tough, flattened snouts. Their pointed ears stand erect, about four to five inches above their head, though sometimes they flop outward. Their moderately long tails are sparsely haired, straight and never coiled like the tail of a domestic pig. They have four cloven feet, similar in appearance to a deer's hooves. Boars have four continually growing tusks that can be extremely sharp. The upper tusks are often 3 to 5 inches long, but have sometimes been recorded at 9 inches in length. These upper canines curl up and out along the sides of the mouth. The lower canines also turn out and curve back toward the eyes. Usually the tusks are broken or worn from use. The boars use their tusks for defense and to establish a dominance hierarchy during breeding. Due to the injuries inflicted by these tusks, boars have also developed a thick, tough skin of cartilage and scar tissue around their shoulders.

## Behavior

The home territory of a feral pig covers an area about 10 square miles or less. However, if food is in short supply, the pigs may range up to 50 square miles. They nest and rest in dense vegetation and secluded thickets. Their nests and beds are small, grass-lined hollows made of piles of grass and twigs.

Feral pigs have a very strong sense of smell. They use tough, flexible nose to sniff out roots, tubers, and small animals living underground. Pigs also have a good sense of hearing, but a poor sense of eyesight. Feral pigs communicate with each other by grunting and squealing, similar to their domestic relatives.

These hoofed mammals can run up to 30 miles per hour and are good swimmers.



Boars usually lead solitary lives, though several may band together. Sows forage with their young, usually about six in a family group. Several family groups may join together to live in a *sounder* (the proper term for a large group of pigs) of 50 or more individuals.

Feral pigs can mate any time of the year. If a sow is not bred during the two or three days she is in estrus, she will become sexually receptive again 21 days later. Generally pigs mate during two peak breeding seasons: one in winter (December through February) and another in early summer. Boars travel between family groups in search of receptive sows. The dominant male mates first. The less dominant males may mate after the dominant boar is finished breeding.

Sexual maturity and reproductive ability of feral pigs greatly depend upon nutrition and habitat. Under optimal conditions, sows can begin breeding at 6 months of age, and produce up to 4 litters per year with each litter consisting of 4 to 12 piglets. In northern portions of their range, biologists report that reproductively active sows generally only produce 2 litters per year consisting of 4-8 piglets.

After about a 115 day gestation period, sows give birth to piglets that weigh from one to two pounds at birth. Juveniles have pale stripes running the length of their body until they are six weeks old. After one week of suckling, the piglets are able to follow their mother around. The young grow rapidly and are weaned in about three months. The offspring disperse after a year with their mother and are usually sexually mature by a year and a half. The young reach adult stature within three years and are fully-grown in five to six years.



Feral Pigs in Jackson County - 2004

Unlike some other hoofed animals, the feral pig has a simple stomach and does not chew cud. Feral pigs are opportunistic omnivores that eat whatever plants or animals happen their way. They especially relish acorns as well as hickory and beech nuts in the autumn. At other times of the year they eat forbs, grasses, leaves, berries and other fruits, roots and tubers, corn and other agricultural crops, insects, crayfish, frogs, salamanders, snakes, mice, eggs of ground-nesting birds, young rabbits, fawns and young livestock, such as lambs, calves, kids. They can also kill

larger livestock that are weak from illness or injury. When fresh meat is not available, feral pigs will also readily scavenge carrion.

Pigs feed most heavily at dawn and dusk, spending the majority of the day either wallowing in mud holes or resting in dense vegetation.

## Origins and Expansion

Domestic pigs were introduced from Europe to the Americas by Spanish explorers. Over time, some pigs escaped or were intentionally released into the wild. Subsequently, free-ranging, feral populations established themselves on American soil.

Today, feral pigs and hybrids of the Russian wild boars are found in 23 states with the possibility of yet-undiscovered populations in several more states. The largest populations are in the coastal states surrounding the Gulf of Mexico and California.

In locations where feral pigs have more recently been discovered it is likely that these individuals are the result of unintentional escapes from domestic swine facilities, escapes or releases from game farms, or illegal stocking. Biologists estimate the nationwide population of feral pigs to be around four million animals.

A map of Wisconsin counties that have had reports of feral pigs over the last several years is attached. These reports were based on sightings or kills.

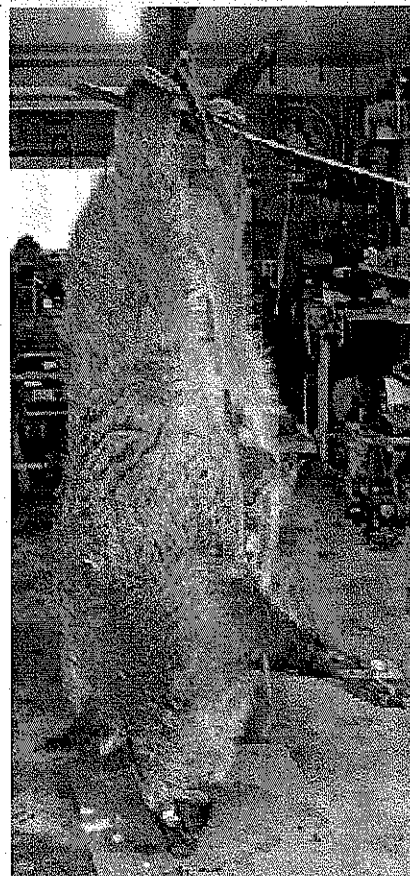
In general, feral pigs can adapt to almost any kind of habitat. However, in other states, they tend to inhabit swamps, brushlands, woodlands, mountain forests and woodlands near agricultural fields.

## Management Concerns and Implications

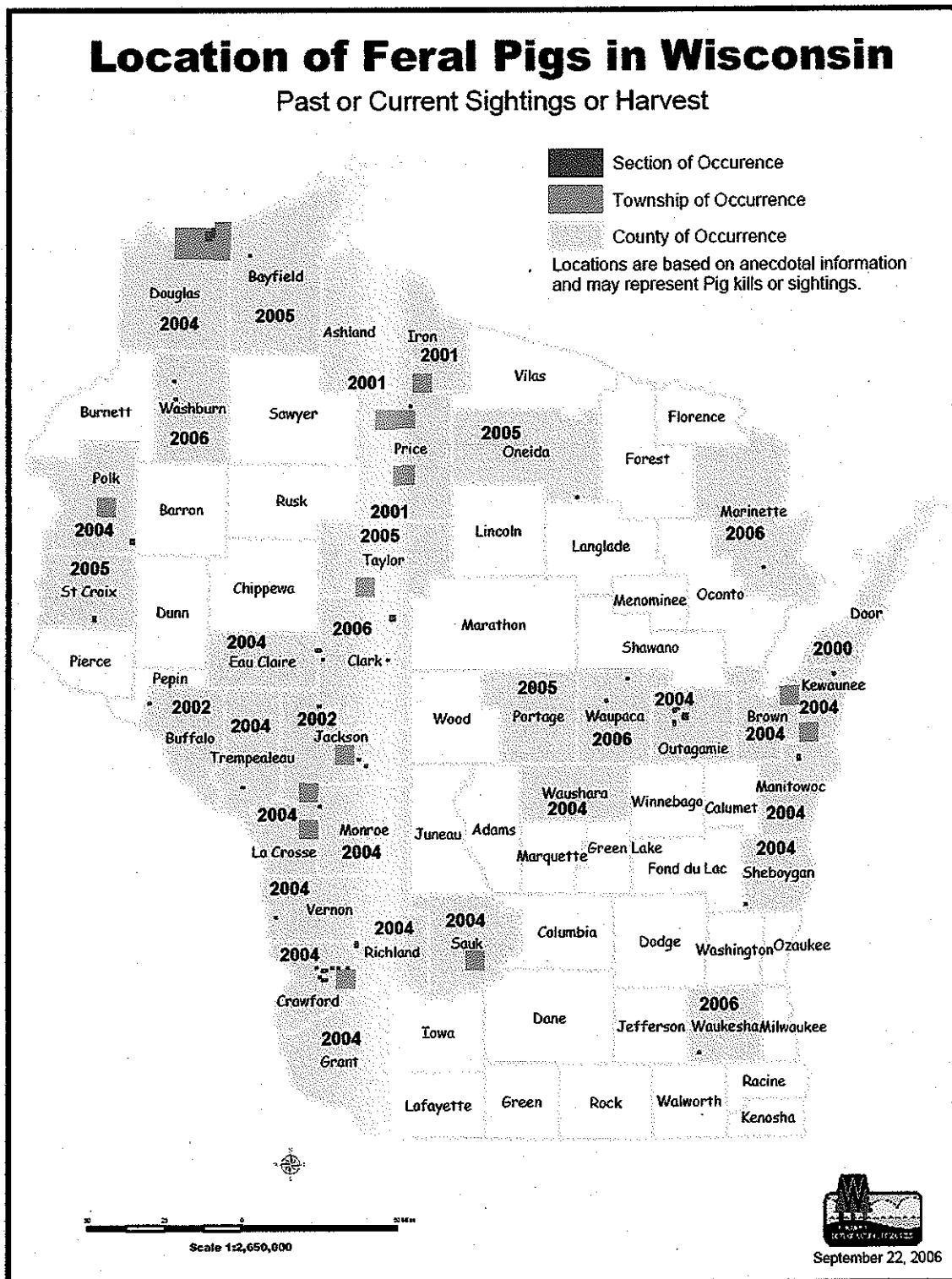
Feral pigs can transmit diseases and parasites to livestock and people. Farmers are especially worried about the potential spread of exotic diseases to their domestic livestock. Of primary concern are diseases such as pseudorabies, brucellosis and tuberculosis. Many farmers are also troubled by potential crop losses. As mentioned above, feral pigs can be extremely destructive to recently planted fields and can damage pastures, facilities and fences, resulting in serious financial losses. Wallows can affect ponds and wetlands by muddying the water, creating algae blooms, destroying aquatic vegetation and lowering overall water quality. Digging and rooting activity of feral pigs near a watercourse leads to bank erosion. All of this activity can lead to decreased livestock use and poor fish production.

Due to feral pigs' tramping and rooting behaviors, Wisconsin's and other state's wildlife biologists are becoming increasingly concerned about the devastation these exotic animals can cause to ecologically sensitive native habitats, particularly native plants and rare,

Feral Pig in Polk County - 2004



threatened or endangered species. These biologists are beginning to document the population declines that feral pigs are inflicting on grassland birds, wetland wildlife, and various small mammals.



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November 27, 2007

TO: Members of the Assembly Rural Affairs Committee

FROM: Jeff Lyon, Director, Governmental Relations

RE: Support Assembly Bill 334 – Add feral swine to the list of harmful wild animals

The Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation fully supports AB 334 and requests that you support it as well. As you know, AB 334 would add feral swine to the list of “harmful wild animals.” When enacted, this designation would make it illegal to possess, introduce, stock or release feral swine into the wild.

The WFBF supports the eradication of feral swine due to animal health concerns. Feral swine can transmit diseases to domestic swine that could ruin individual farms and the state’s entire pork industry. They carry the influenza virus, and can also transmit foot-and-mouth disease and even tuberculosis, which threatens our dairy industry. The state Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection’s level of concern with feral swine increased significantly after last spring’s pseudorabies outbreak in Clark County, because there may have been a link to feral pigs in that case.

In addition to animal health concerns, feral swine cause significant crop damage and destroy native plants and vegetation.

The WFBF understands that an amendment may be offered to establish a hunting season for feral swine, with a specific license for feral swine. The WFBF opposes the amendment and asks that you oppose the amendment as well.

The establishment of a hunting season implies that the feral swine population would be managed by the state Department of Natural Resources to provide hunting opportunities. When the DNR manages a wildlife population it is to either protect decreasing numbers or encourage an over harvest when a wildlife population is out of control. Establishing a hunting season would limit the number and when feral swine could be harvested.

Right now, landowners can shoot feral swine anytime without a license while anyone else can shoot feral swine as long as they have a small game license.

Again, the WFBF asks for your support of AB 334. The “harmful wildlife” designation will help the DNR and DATCP in the eradication of feral swine.







State of Wisconsin  
Jim Doyle, Governor

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**Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection**  
Rod Nilsestuen, Secretary

November 21, 2007

**Memo**

**To: Representative Nerison**

**From: Paul J. McGraw, DVM**  
**Assistant State Veterinarian**  
**Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection organizer and**  
**representative on the interagency feral swine task force**

**Regarding: Assembly Amendment 1, to 2007 Assembly Bill 334**

Feral swine are a dangerous risk of disease to commercial swine and a threat to the environment itself. Current laws allow hunters to kill feral swine with an existing small game license with no limit on season or number that may be killed. The proposed amendment to AB 334 would remove the language labeling feral swine as a harmful wild animal. This would decrease the authority to regulate these feral or wild swine and decrease the penalty for releasing or stocking feral or wild swine. Harmful wild animals are explained fully in Chapter 169.11. Furthermore, it is of concern that a hunting season may be created and a separate license would have to be purchased to hunt wild or feral swine. This could have one of two effects, both negative;

1. It could decrease the killing of feral or wild swine by current hunters who may not want to purchase a special hunting license to hunt feral or wild swine.
2. It could make hunting feral or wild swine more attractive to the population in general which could lead to import and release of more feral or wild swine to improve hunting opportunities thus increasing the population.

As the organizer and DATCP representative to the feral swine task force, I would recommend that this amendment not be adopted and AB 334 move forward to label feral or wild swine as a harmful wild animal.

Paul J. McGraw, DVM  
Assistant State Veterinarian



# **STATE OF WISCONSIN**

## ***Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection***

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Madison, WI 53708-8911  
Phone: 608-224-4880  
FAX: 608-224-4871***

November 21, 2007

To: Representative Lee Nerison

From: Dr. Robert G. Ehlenfeldt, State Veterinarian

Subject: AB 334 and Assembly Amendment 1

I am writing to you as the chief sponsor of AB 334 designating feral or wild swine as a harmful species. I strongly support AB 334; however I do not support Assembly Amendment 1 to this bill.

As you know feral swine present a significant disease risk to livestock and humans as well as an environmental risk to the state of Wisconsin. Earlier this year we had an outbreak of pseudorabies in Wisconsin linked to feral swine. Most of the state and federal field staff in Wisconsin was fully employed responding to this outbreak over a three week time period. The state would have incurred additional costs for indemnifying the owners of the swine that needed to be destroyed had federal funds not been available. The Wisconsin outbreak has essentially eliminated those funds and it is unlikely future federal funds will be available.

Last year Iowa had an outbreak of swine brucellosis linked to feral swine. This disease is also a zoonotic and the owner of the domestic swine herd that was infected also became infected with brucellosis.

Designating feral or wild-type swine as harmful animals is the right thing to do. It would be supported by every state veterinarian in the US. There are only a few ways to control feral swine. One is education to prevent their introduction in the first place. Another is trapping by USDA Wildlife Services or WDNR. A third method is hunting.

Over the past few years both DATCP and DNR have strongly encouraged hunters to kill feral swine when they encounter them. Currently property owners can do this on their own land without a hunting license. Others can kill them under a small game license. Given the current

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population estimates, Wisconsin has an excellent chance of controlling and eliminating feral swine. In only a few more years the population will hit a level where this will not be possible.

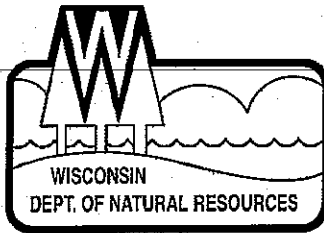
Assembly Amendment 1 designates feral or wild swine as a game animal and authorizes the DNR to charge a fee for a special swine hunting license. There are two potentially very negative effects of this amendment.

State agencies have asked hunters to step up and help us solve a problem for the betterment of livestock producers and the environment. Currently we have gotten very good cooperation from hunters with virtually no cost to the state. Charging them a fee for helping us solve a problem is counter-productive.

Secondly if they are required to pay a license fee there is a real possibility they could release swine so they would have something to hunt as long as they were paying for the privilege.

As I stated earlier, I strongly recommend passage of AB 334 as written without Assembly Amendment 1.





## State of Wisconsin \ DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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Matthew J. Frank, Secretary

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November 26, 2007

To: Honorable Representative Lee Nerison  
From: Brad Koele, Wildlife Damage Specialist  
Subject: Assembly Amendment 1 to 2007 Assembly Bill 334

We appreciate your work on Assembly Bill 334 which the department supports. We are, however, opposed to Assembly Amendment 1 because we believe it will actually make eradication of the feral swine more difficult.

As you know, The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has adopted the position that feral pigs are exotic, non-native wild animals that pose significant threats to both the environment and to agricultural operations. The Department promotes aggressive removal anywhere feral pigs are reported.

Some of our concerns with the amendment are that:

- Instead of focusing on control of these invasive species, it will tend to promote them as a game species in Wisconsin which will only lead to more people wanting to have them around for hunting.
- Creating a separate hunting license for wild hogs/feral pigs is unnecessary, and will only make it more difficult for the public to help control escaped wild hogs. Under this amendment, instead of simply being able to kill them under their small game, sports, archery or patrons hunting license as can be done now, a person with only an archery or small game license will have to purchase an additional hunting license.
- A landowner will no longer be able to shoot wild/feral hogs on sight on their land without a license or special permit from the DNR. By defining them a game animal under s. 29.001(36), Stats., landowners will have to also have a hunting license, or first apply for and be issued a written authorization to remove hogs that are causing a nuisance or damage under NR 12.10, Wis. Adm. Code.
- Creating an exemption to the shining restrictions for use of night vision scopes is not needed. They are already legal to use for species that can be lawfully hunted at night without hunting hour restrictions.
- Because the amendment no longer lists wild/feral hogs as a harmful wild animal it would not prohibit or regulate possession of captive live wild hogs and will not stop this possible source of introductions into the wild.
- Finally, this amendment will make anyone who hunts wild/feral hogs without a license a criminal which we believe is excessive and would make prosecution of cases involving any illegal killing of a wild/feral hog unnecessarily difficult.







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November 28, 2007

Representative Lee Nerison  
Room 310 North, State Capitol  
P.O. Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708

**VIA EMAIL ONLY**

RE: Wisconsin Pork Association Supports AB 334

Dear Representative Nerison:

I am writing on behalf of the Wisconsin Pork Association (WPA) to express the WPA's support for AB 334, which designates feral swine as "harmful wild animals," thereby making it illegal to possess, introduce, stock or release feral swine into the wild.

WPA seeks the elimination of feral swine in Wisconsin in order to prevent animal disease outbreaks like the recent outbreak of Psuedorabies in hogs in Clark County, which threatened commercial pork production in Wisconsin. We know that feral hogs can harbor disease and parasites that can be spread to domestic swine. Feral hogs also cause significant damage to woodlots and fields because they root up the soil in search of food and protection for offspring.

We understand that Assembly Amendment 1 has been offered, which would eliminate the "harmful wild animal" designation and, instead, create a hunting season for feral swine. The WPA opposes this amendment. We support current law, which allows landowners to shoot feral swine at any time when they are found on the landowner's property. The creation of a hunting season implies that feral swine are a game animal whose population should be managed by the DNR for recreational purposes. In contrast, feral swine are a threat to Wisconsin's livestock production and, therefore, should be eliminated.

Sincerely,

**DEWITT ROSS & STEVENS s.c.**

Jordan K. Lamb

JKL: jkl

cc. Mike Wehler, Wisconsin Pork Association (*via email only*)

